



"Alarming" Increase in HIV, Syphilis Cases in Tennessee

Newly diagnosed HIV and syphilis cases have increased significantly in Shelby County, Tennessee, since 2018.

June 6, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

In recent years, reported [HIV](#) and [syphilis](#) cases have surged in [Tennessee's](#) Shelby County, which encompasses Memphis, prompting a response from the [Shelby County Health Department](#) (SCHD), reports [WREG-TV News Channel 3](#).

According to the Tennessee Department of Health (THD), since 2018, HIV rates have increased by 36%, and syphilis rates have increased by 100% in Shelby. The individuals most impacted are between 14 and 35 years old, noted the county health department without citing specific figures.

HIV rates among those between ages 15 and 19 increased by 40% during this time. That same age group saw a 150% increase in syphilis rates, according to SCHD.

While the extent of the [outbreak](#) has not yet been quantified for the public, last month, the SCHD shared the Shelby County ZIP codes with the highest incidence of sexually transmitted infections.

The ZIP codes most affected were located throughout the greater Memphis area (38103, 38107 and 38109).

To address the "alarming" increase in newly diagnosed HIV cases, SCHD, in partnership with TDH, United Way of Greater Nashville and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is launching an outreach program to bring [HIV testing](#) and treatment to communities with the highest rates of HIV.

"Knowing your HIV status is the first step to protecting your health," said SCHD's Michelle Taylor, MD, [in a news release](#). "HIV can be successfully suppressed with medications, allowing HIV-

positive persons to live long and healthy lives.”

To encourage countywide testing and treatment for HIV and STIs, SCHD offers a [full list of locations in Shelby County](#) where folks can get tested for free.

The HIV rate increase arrives less than two years after Republican leadership in the state, including the governor, [rejected federal funding to help prevent HIV](#) and after the [Department of Justice sued Tennessee for enforcing state laws that discriminate against people with HIV](#). (Earlier this month, the [Shelby County district attorney general agreed to end prosecutions](#) of those discriminatory HIV crime laws).

For other Tennessee news, see “[Country Music Gays & HIV](#),” a POZ Q + A with publicist-turned-country music crooner David Michael.

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